



**KEEP THE PROMISE
COALITION**
Advocacy and action for Connecticut's mental health

Appropriations Committee Hearing
March 1st, 2023

Testimony of Jordan Fairchild,
Coordinator and Community Organizer,
Keep The Promise Coalition

In Regards to H.B. 6659 *An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025 And Making Appropriations Therefor*, and the proposed budget for DSS.

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jordan Fairchild, I live in Hartford, and I am the Coordinator and Community Organizer for Keep The Promise Coalition (KTP), a grassroots group of CT advocates with lived experience of mental health conditions, addiction, and co-occurring disabilities.

I'm testifying in regards to the proposed budget for DSS.

DSS closures and call center availability:

Many of our members who rely on DSS for critical health insurance and other supports have experienced profound difficulty contacting DSS due to long periods of time spend on hold, and due to call center closures on Wednesdays and closures before noon during other days of the week. This has created a barrier to necessary customer service for assistance with applications and other issues— especially for working people who may have limited time and availability to call DSS. Call centers should be open all normal business hours and customers should not have to wait hours on the phone to resolve their issue.

KTP supports providing adequate funding for DSS personnel to open the call centers during regular business hours Monday through Friday.

Funding for increases to HUSKY C income and asset limits:

HUSKY C is the Medicaid program for people who are aging, blind, or disabled under the social security definition, who cannot work. HUSKY C provides coverage for necessary services such as dental, vision, and hearing, and coverage for home health care and medical transportation. **Many of our members require these services and rely on HUSKY C for coverage.** These services make it possible for many to live their lives in the community, living more fulfilling lives, and saving great costs by avoiding institutionalization.

KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

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The current income and asset limits for HUSKY C are extremely low, with income limits of an effective 94% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and asset limits of \$1,600 for a single person and \$2,400 for couples. They force otherwise eligible individuals who need the coverage that HUSKY C provides to either spend down, or pay out of pocket for necessary medical services. These make HUSKY C the most restrictive Medicaid program in Connecticut.

This year, H.B. 6630 would increase these limits to 138% of FPL for income (matching the income limit for HUSKY D), and \$10,000 and \$15,000 for assets. This proposal would allow people with disabilities who are on HUSKY C to save for emergencies, without being forced to spend down their assets or lose their coverage.

These increases are currently unaccounted for in the proposed budget. There is no good reason that people with disabilities should have to meet more stringent income and asset requirements to qualify for Medicaid than people without disabilities. This discrepancy is discriminatory and Connecticut must be address it, as California and New York did recently.

KTP supports allocating an additional \$22.5 million to raise the income and asset limits for HUSKY C.

Funding for HUSKY for Immigrants:

For that matter, the discriminatory eligibility requirements don't stop with people with disabilities. Immigrants in Connecticut deserve the right to HUSKY coverage, regardless of immigration status. They make our state a better place, and providing coverage now will save greater costs later on from greater and more severe medical complications. But most of all, immigrants are human beings deserving of healthy lives.

Until Connecticut addresses health disparities for its immigrant communities, Connecticut has failed to address health disparities overall.

KTP supports funding to expand HUSKY coverage to people up to 26 years old, regardless of immigration status.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony,

Jordan Fairchild,
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